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## PARTNERSHIP FOR ENHANCED ENGAGEMENT IN RESEARCH

The Lower Mekong basin is rich in biodiversity; however, there are considerable knowledge gaps in the threats facing existing biodiversity. Through the Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement in Research (PEER) program, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is supporting a regional network of scientists to better understand some of the region's most pressing biodiversity challenges.

USAID PEER is a global competitive grants program that allows scientists from developing countries to apply for USAID funds for research and training activities in partnership with U.S. Government-funded collaborators. The project has an annual call for proposals and supports research activities in a range of areas related to USAID's development priorities. Since PEER's launch in 2011, it has supported more than 280 projects in over 50 countries with an investment of about \$75 million.

### IMPROVING MANAGEMENT OF MEKONG FISHERIES

The Mekong River is rich in biodiversity and critical to regional food security, but it is under threat. Four linked research projects seek to understand the impacts of hydropower and climate change on Mekong fisheries and enable better fisheries management by characterizing genetic diversity and spatial structure, as well as establishing long-term monitoring of economically and ecologically important fish species in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam.

MONTAKAN TANCHASAWAT / USAID

## EMPOWERING WOMEN SCIENTISTS

PEER projects address the cultural barriers that dissuade women from research careers by supporting a network of women scientists studying the diversity, distribution and conservation of reptiles and amphibians in the Mekong, as well as the impacts of human activities on these species in Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. In the past two years, this network has discovered two new species of frogs and published their work in prestigious international journals.

### RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Establishment of the first genetic biodiversity research network for the Mekong River Basin.
- Supported the International Conference on Conservation Genetics in the Mekong River Basin, with over 70 participants from 10 countries discussing conservation genetics and resource management in the Mekong River Basin.
- Supported research to document fish migration of representative species of the Laos Se Kong River, its tributaries, and the Mekong River using genetic mapping techniques.

**PARTNERS** Partners include the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, U.S. National Science Foundation, Nha Trang University, Old Dominion University, Can Tho University, Inland Fisheries Research and Department Institute (IFReDI), Mekong River Commission, Living Aquatic Resources Research Center (LARReC), UbonRatchathani University, North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, University of Science Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam National University, Royal University of Phnom Penh and the American Museum of Natural History.

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